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ABSTRACT

A concern with the interrelationship between the formal structure of the high school and the behavior of its continually changing participant constituency is manifested in this paper. The concepts of role theory, status, social organization, and hierarchical structures are discussed in their relation to a processual role model. Within this model, it is stressed that the organization of interest is not the formal organization of the school but the organization of behavior among participants in a social situation. This behavior is noted for its interactive nature, and is thought to be influenced but not determined by the formal organization of the school just as it is influenced but not determined by the extra-institutional norms and goals of the individual participants. The statuses which the formal structure allocates to individuals in the high school situation vary with a series of formal rules, restrictions and obligations. These do not, it is pointed out, define what the individuals in fact will do in that formal status, but set up the parameters within which they may operate. These rules, restrictions and obligations are the components of what previously has been called "role" but is felt here to be more justifiably considered as constraints placed upon the individuals who occupy a particular formally defined status. (Author/KSM)

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General Status: Specific Role

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Educational institutions have relatively clear formal boundaries. Within these boundaries there operate a number of persons falling into different social classifications--student, teacher, administrator, secretary and the like. The classifications are clearly recognized and unambiguous. Their populations, however, have a continual rate of turnover. For some units this is complete, and temporally prescribed, for others, it is partial and irregular. Positions in the formal organizational structure do not completely determine the interaction of the individuals involved. Rather, they leave a considerable amount of room for individual management and the development of informal sub- or cross-cutting categories. This paper is concerned with the interrelationship between the formal structure and the behavior of the continually changing participant constituency.

Role theory as generally developed does not provide an adequate basis for the understanding of social process. This is especially true in situations where primary recognized statuses leave open a very broad range of possible social behavior. These statuses may be termed 'general.' If, as has frequently been the case, analysts define role in terms of status, role becomes a very general concept and does little to explicate the behavior of individuals. This paper will argue for a usage of 'role' as specific to the individual.

'Role' is a study of interaction. It may deal either with abstractions from the behavior of a group of category of individuals, or with the actual behavior and experience of a single individual. The former focus has

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been the more common one in sociological investigations. It is, however, ill-defined and worse used. The confusion between different interpretations of the concept of role can readily be seen. In the first chapter of their prominent reader on role theory, Bruce Biddle and Edwin Thomas comment:

> Sometimes the role analyst focuses on the behavior of a given individual, sometimes on a specific aggregate of individuals, and sometimes he studies particular groupings of individuals who display given behaviors. (1966, p. 3)

Already there is question as to whether one starts one's investigation with a category chosen on some unknown, non-role basis, or on the basis of behavior exhibited. In other words, does one study the behavior of the occupants of a particular position, or does one designate categories of people as those who behave in a certain way. Both categorizations can be valid, but they are not interchangeable, and not necessarily equally valuable to role analysis. Status and role have been part of a theory based on a kind of circular reasoning. Each is defined in terms of the other. This problem might be avoided if concepts of role were recognized to be based on behaviors exhibited by particular individuals, as conceptually autonomous units, while statuses only exist as structural aspects of interrelations between individuals. Thus, we can make a statement of order: we abstract to the concept of status from role behavior. The two are at different levels of focus. The discussion of individuals in society as acting out "positions" seems a reification of the abstraction. A position exists at a single point in time, role is a continuum of action.

People do have expectations of the actions they themselves and others will take. Further, formal organizations define positions and an accompanying

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set of expected behaviors. Both the expectations and the requirements of a given position influence what an individual occupying that position will do. They do not however determine it, nor do they equal it. Positions do bring about behavior, but not through a direct process. There is an intervening factor--the individual. The individual always has past and concurrent statuses and informal relations. How one chooses to construct any single conceptualization of this 'status' becomes a highly arbitrary process. There is a tendency for social scientists to assume the categories which are formally used by the groups or organizations they study. Durkheim warned against this quite some time ago:

> Man cannot live in an environment without forming some ideas about it according to which he regulates his behavior. But because these ideas are nearer to us and more within our mental reach than the realities to which they correspond, we tend naturally to substitute them for the latter and to make them the very subject of our speculations. Instead of observing, describing and comparing things, we are content to focus our consciousness upon, to analyze, and to combine our ideas. Instead of a science concerned with realities, we produce no more than an ideological analysis... Such a science therefore proceeds from ideas to things, not from things to ideas. It is clear that this method cannot give objective results. (1895, pp. 14, 15)

Categories with objective components can still be reified. These categories, like all other folk categories, are material to be analyzed, not the tools of analysis. These latter must be developed in scientific investigation of the facts. The behavior expected of occupants of certain social positions may, I think, better be denoted by the phrase "role expectations" than by "role." Role is actual behavior, with the quality of being in any case either more or less like, but never exactly what is expected. The argument here is

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analogous to population vs. typological thinking in biology.

In brief, it is role that includes statuses, not the other way around. Status is not behavior and it is inherently at a higher level of abstraction. For example, a person may hold the formally defined position of being a teacher in a high school. This person may also be a parent, a union organizer, a student and a voter. All of these other statuses overlap with that of teacher. Not only is there a sum of diverse influences, but there are particular temporal juxtapositions which are relevant. An administrator's insult/may come immediately on the heels of a union meeting and to a teacher be taken much the worse for it. Combined with a myriad of other influences from past and concurrent positions, the interaction of constraints and pressures produced by these positions, and the physical and psychological life of the individual, this combination of positions determines the individual's role. It would be naive to think that all teachers either do the same things or are treated the same way in a school. Nonetheless, this is a basic assumption of the formal charters of most educational institutions. Informally, participants make allowances, and indeed construct systems to deal with non-chartered influences and behaviors. These non-chartered occurrences are frequent and often regular.

The salient question for analysis becomes not why do the teachers fail to perform according to the expectations of the charter, but according to what determinants do teachers perform? It should be made clear that failure to perform to the tenets of the charter in no way is simply a negative imputation toward teachers. No one performs directly and completely according to the tenets of the charter, simply because those tenets do not

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encompass the entire sphere of decisions necessary to existence and interaction. Rather, if teachers' performances are seen to not be the simple result of the position "teacher" and if their variance is not uniform we must look to construct models of the influences which produce the role of each individual teacher. We must attempt to construct an image of the role of each individual teacher and, of course, for students, administrators and the rest of the population. With this as the starting point, we can begin to look at the social organization of the school.

Social organization refers to the patterned mediation of interpersonal relations. Barth has referred to "transaction as the analytic isolate in the field of social organization." (1966, p. 5) In this way he is attempting to give voice to the individual as actor, to the continuity of his existence, and to the strategies with which he operates and the decisions he must make. One may thus generate forms and compare them to empirical evidence, hopefully achieving more of the objectivity Durkheim was calling for in 1895. Barth's suggestion is that it is most productive to concentrate on the processual aspect of social life. In this he follows Radcliffe-Brown:

> ...the concrete reality with which the social anthropologist is concerned in observation, description, comparison and classification, is not any sort of entity, but a process, the process of social life.... The process itself consists of an immense multitude of actions and interrelations of human beings, acting as individuals or in combinations or groups. Amidst the diversity of the particular events there are discoverable regularities, so that it is possible to give statements or descriptions of certain general features of the social life of a selected region. (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, pp. 3-4)

Barth develops Radcliffe-Brown's statement with a discussion of generative models. In particular, he suggests that social anthropologists are of

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necessity first concerned with describing frequencies. This is not the whole of the process, however.

> Explanation is not achieved by a description of the patterns of regularity, no matter how meticulous and adequate, nor by replacing this description by other abstractions congruent with it, but by exhibiting what makes the pattern, i.e. certain processes. (Barth, 1966, p. 2)

It is Barth's intention to

> ...explore the extent to which patterns of social form can be explained if we assume that they are the cumulative result of a number of separate choices and decisions made by people acting vis-a-vis one another. In other words, that the patterns are generated through processes of interaction and in their form reflect the constraints and incentives under which people act. (1966, p. 2)

Important to this position is the notion that

> this transformation from constraints and incentives to frequentive patterns of behavior in a population is complex but has a structure of its own. (1966, p. 2)

The organization we are concerned with is not the formal organization of the school. It is,rather, the organization of behavior among participants in a social situation. This behavior is interactive in its nature, and is influenced but not determined by the formal organization of the school, just as it is influenced but not fully determined by the extra-institutional norms and goals of the individual participants. These are all "constraints and incentives" and, I should add, sometimes tools, for a continual process of transaction and negotiation among members of the school population.

In his discussion of "Inter-hierarchical Roles" (1968) Gluckman emphasizes the important mediational aspect of the roles of native commissioners and chiefs in South Africa. Prevented by the color bar from crossing into the hierarchical structures of the other group formally and directly,

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these men developed highly important networks of social relations on the classificatory borders. Gluckman concentrates his analysis on the district commissioners, technical officers and other relatively low level officials of the government who identified in many ways with the aspirations and achievements of the tribesmen (in this case Zulu) that they worked with. In another tribal and temporal context, Joan Vincent (1970) has analyzed the importance of the ability of local 'big men' in small towns to mediate dealings with outside hierarchical authorities. These two classifications of roles which work in the mediation of social boundaries are both relevant to the study of American high schools. In particular, these roles are important in the relations between students and teachers, but they influence the interactions of all categories in the school (see Calhoun and Ianni, in press). Gluckman points out the importance of recognized common interests in achieving consensus and cohesion, and of the role of occupants of inter-hierarchical positions in producing recognition of common interests. The hierarchical structure of high school organization gives rise to a number of tensions over territoriality (as in Edward Reynolds' and Carol Lopate's papers, 1973) over grading and other sorting procedures (as in Herve Varenne's paper, 1973) and in the granting of special privileges (as in Rodney Riffel's paper, 1973). In the interactions between adults and students in the schools, there are a number of persons whose roles bring them into contact with members of other classificatory units in the context of various strategies and goals. A student with a problem with the administration may ask a teacher to intercede on his behalf. The student council may decide to take action to attempt to have a school rule altered. Certain teachers may be allocated the re-

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sponsibility for seeing that students do not misuse a certain space such as a senior lounge.

Most studies which have been done of American schools have assumed closure at the point of "student culture" or a teachers' association. This is analogous to the African researches Gluckman cites which have assumed closure at a level below the influence of the native commissioner and similar officials (1968). This is valid methodology for certain questions and issues. Like Gluckman, however,"I believe we can get some understanding of the local tribal area by looking at the effects of actions emerging from these higher echelons." The converse may also very frequently be true. We can learn something about the higher levels of a hierarchy by studying effects emerging from lower echelons of the organization in question.

The processual role model sketched out above could provide a sound basis for the undertaking of research into the relations between members of different classificatory units in a social situation, and into the effects of simultaneous membership in multiple classificatory units of the individual and his behavior. The high school is a particularly attractive setting for this kind of research for several reasons. It has a highly developed ideological model of its own organization in which a considerable amount of emotional and bureaucratic weight is invested. Continual observation and evaluation by outsiders is the norm in high schools so that relating to the formal structure of the institution remains a continual practical task for constituents. In addition, the formal structure is a common language for the mediation of interaction between the various sub-groups in the high school. Our research has indicated that virtually no one in the high school really

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believes that the formal structural model of the school (the charter) actually explains what goes on. It remains a constant which can be differentially invoked to meet the needs of different particular situations.

The statuses which this formal structure allocates to the different individuals in the school situation carry with them a series of formal rules, restrictions, and obligations. These by no means define what the individual in fact will do in that formal status. Rather, they set up the parameters within which he may operate or which he must manipulate. These rules, restrictions and obligations are the components of what many analysts have previously called role. This, I suggest, is a mistake. These are constraints placed upon the operation of the individuals who occupy a particular formally defined status. Their effect is by no means simple or clear. Goffman (1959, 1961 and 1963 and elsewhere) has written extensively about the importance of the process of identity management. When he discusses the efforts of an individual with a certain social stigma to manipulate to his advantage or to disguise his stigma he is discussing the attempt of one person to circumvent normative (and I do not mean normal) social process. "Mental retardate" is a formally defined status in our society, particularly in the society of the hospital which Goffman studies in Asylums. When someone given the status "mental retardate" attempts to pass as a neurotic or psychotic patient, he is managing that status (1961). In the process of status management he performs his role. His role includes his embellishments and his deceits. These are not mere aberrations or errors. In a very similar vein, quite some time before, Homans distinguished between 'norms' and 'behaviors.' (1950 and elsewhere) The individual variances in role performance among

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holders of the same status are no more errors than Schell's "Hamlet" is an error in contrast to Burton's, or Olivier's or Gielgud's. In a more modern vein, Gould's "Marlowe" is not an error in contrast to Bogart's, or even James Garner's. Shakespeare did not write all there is to Hamlet, and Raymond Chandler did not write all there is to Phillip Marlowe. Certainly having seen Bogart as Marlowe we have a role expectation, and Gould is a jolt to many a purist. But did Howard Hawks direct Bogart more truly than Robert Altman did Gould? Does Mr. X in the math department act more like a teacher than Ms. Y in Social Studies? Audiences and critics will eventually decide whether or not they liked Elliott Gould's "Marlowe," and students, administrators and parents--in short, audiences--will decide whether they like Ms. Y's "teacher." One cannot have a role apart from an actor. Even more, one cannot have a role apart from a performance.

There is a constant process of negotiation taking place in schools. The process takes place on many fronts among all the constituents of the institution, and perhaps even a few who are imagined. Each person performs his role taking note of his numerous and varied statuses, and those of others insofar as he knows them, and deems them relevant. He may manipulate his situation to whatever he perceives as advantage. If we may continue Barth's earlier analogy to the Theory of Games, the rules of the game do not determine the series of moves which any player will make. The rules do not describe the combination of moves he has made. They may describe many of the individual moves, but it is the combination which wins or loses, and it is the combination of actions which constitutes an individual's role.

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